

For Immediate Release

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Defense Department App Helps Service Members Cope with Distress

Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.—The Virtual Hope Box mobile application released by the Defense Department helps service members focus on positive influences in their life when they are upset or having a bad day. Using the app, a person combines meaningful memories with relaxation coaching and distracting activities to help them cope when they are feeling down.

“It’s a supportive tool for people to help them remember the good in their life when they are feeling frustrated, stressed out, confused, lacking direction and less hopeful about the future,” said Dr. Nigel Bush, research psychologist at the National Center for Telehealth and Technology.

The Virtual Hope Box puts everything in one, easily accessible place. Unlike other health-related apps which offer generic content, each user creates a unique and personal app by customizing the various sections of the app with items from their own life that are particularly pertinent to them.

Users add their family photos, videos and recorded messages from loved ones, inspirational quotes, favorite songs, interactive relaxation exercises, affirmations, and reminders of successes and future aspirations. Users can also distract themselves with games to take their mind off negative feelings, thoughts or situations. Also, with this app on their smartphone, the user can immediately contact support systems by calling, texting, or sending email.

Providers will find this app a useful resource to recommend to their patients who are experiencing distress. In a clinical setting, a patient might set up his or her Virtual Hope Box with guidance from their provider and use the tool between therapy sessions. The app was developed from the physical “hope box” used by clinicians providing therapy for patients with thoughts of self-harm. Because mobile devices are widely used, a virtual version of a hope box was seen as a contemporary approach to a known intervention, extending its usefulness and availability.

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“It’s a unique way to continuously extend in-person therapy. It can help patients reengage with their lives,” said Bush.

Recent research and testing has shown the Virtual Hope Box to be a useful tool for addressing many issues. Patients in the proof-of-concept testing included those diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder and mood disorder.

The most frequently used sections of the app were “Distract Me,” “Remind Me” and “Inspire Me.” Patients quickly became familiar with the Virtual Hope Box and felt comfortable personalizing their app. The patients used the app more often than a physical hope box, and were likely to use the app in the future and recommend it to their friends.

The app was developed collaboratively with the Department of Veterans Affairs and funded by a grant from the Military Suicide Research Consortium.

The free mobile app is available for Android and iOS devices at the App Store, Google Play, and Amazon for Kindle Fire.

About T2

The National Center for Telehealth and Technology, located at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., serves as the primary Defense Department office for cutting-edge approaches in applying technology to psychological health. The center is a component of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, and aligned with the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command.

Its mission is to lead the innovation of health technology solutions for psychological health and traumatic brain injury, and deliver tested, valued health solutions that improve the lives of our nation’s warriors, veterans and their families.

The center’s advanced health technology solutions are user-friendly, valued by service members and cost-effective. The center also supports the Department of Defense’s goals of increasing access to care, establishing best practices and quality standards for health technology and telehealth, and reducing both military suicide rates and the prevalence of stigma associated with seeking behavioral health services. For more information, visit us at <http://www.t2.health.mil>.

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